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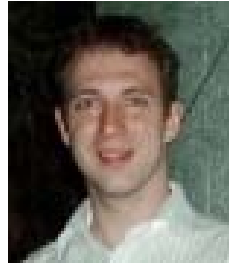
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# Sino-Indian Relations

## Sixty Years of Experience and Enlightenment



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# SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS

## Sixty Years of Experience and Enlightenment

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CHENG RUIHENG

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On 1 April 1950, India became the first country among non-socialist countries to establish diplomatic relations with New China, thus leaving behind a thick stroke of writing in the annals of friendly relations between China and India. Since then, relations between China and India, the two large countries in Asia, have entered a new era. From 1950 to 1958, China-India relations witnessed a friendly 'honey-moon' phase, with the slogan of 'Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai' resounding across the land of both countries. However, it was indeed very unfortunate that China-India relations sharply deteriorated after 1959 owing to their differences on the Tibet question and China-India boundary question and under the influence of a number of complicated factors, both international and internal, leading to the border conflict in 1962 and confrontation between the two countries for more than ten years. Since 1976, China-India relations were gradually restored and improved. In 1988, the visit of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China became a major turning point for China-India relations, which entered a new period of overall restoration and development after that, with only a short setback in 1998 after India's nuclear tests. With the beginning of the new century, a rapid development of China-India relations was achieved and a Strategic and Cooperative Partnership was established in 2005.

In general, India is one of China's

neighbors with whom China's relationship has witnessed big ups and downs after the founding of New China. It will be very beneficial to sum up some experiences and enlightenments from the tortuous course of China-India relations. At present, though the general trend of China-

India relations is good, there exist some unstable factors in the relations, due to the fact that the China-India boundary question remains unresolved and mutual trust between the two countries is insufficient. Therefore, it is important to sum up and reflect on the past in order for both countries to march towards the future in a better way.

### I

#### CHERISHING HISTORICAL FRIENDSHIP

There has been a history of friendship between China and India lasting more than two thousand years. During his meeting with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes in April 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao said that for the past 2200 years, China and India had devoted 99.9 per cent of their time to friendly cooperation between the two countries. These remarks made by Premier Wen Jiabao indicated how much he cherished the historical friendship between China and India.

Reviewing the history of China-India relations, people can see many moving

events such as visits paid by reverend Indian monks to China and visits by Chinese reverend monks including Xuan Zhuang to India, taking back Buddhist scriptures from India. Among China's neighbors, India was one of the very few countries, which did not have a war with China in history. Especially in their struggle against imperialism and colonialism, peoples of both China and India sympathized with each other and supported each other, with fraternal friendship established. The heroic deeds of the Indian Medical Mission to China including Dr Kotnis, dedicating themselves to the cause of liberation of the Chinese people, are still well remembered and highly praised by both people.

By cherishing the historical friendship between the Chinese and Indian people and regarding it as a kind of common wealth of both nations and the foundation for developing friendly relations, both sides could have stronger determination and greater initiative to promote their friendship, so that new milestones could be set up one in the history of China-India friendship that benefit the future generations. At the same time greater determination could also help make both sides more sober-minded and prudent in dealing with some of the major differences emerging between them, so that confrontation could be avoided and conflict prevented. In order to enhance friendly sentiments of both peoples, it is necessary for governments, organizations and media of both countries to attach much more importance to widely publicizing and commemorating the major events and prominent figures in the history of friendship of the two countries and building essential sites of historical memento, so that the historical friendship of both countries

could strike deeper root in the heart of both peoples.

## II

### **HARMONY BEING PRECIOUS**

Through reviewing the history of sixty years of diplomatic relations between China and India and making comparisons of those different periods of friendship, confrontation and renewal of friendship, a conclusion of incomparable importance for both governments and peoples could be obtained, i.e. harmony is precious.

Friendly relations between China and India from 1950 to 1958 brought out great gains, either from the angle of peaceful construction of both countries or from the angle of safeguarding peace in Asia and the world.

During Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to India in 1954, both sides established the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', as guiding principles for China-India relations. At the end of that year, Indian Prime Minister Nehru paid a visit to China, holding very good talks with Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai. In 1956, Premier Zhou Enlai paid another visit to India. All these events led to a high tide of friendship between China and India, which had been unprecedented in history. It was during this period that India gave up its special privileges in Tibet.

China-India friendly relations were conducive to creating a peaceful environment necessary for the peaceful construction of both countries, which had won independence not yet long before.

Maintaining friendly relations with India

and Pakistan, China adopted a neutral stand on the Kashmir issue. It was shown that China-India relations were helpful to safeguarding peace and stability in South Asia.

China and India had very good cooperation in international affairs. Take the Bandung Conference in 1955 as an example. Before the conference, both India and Burma (now Myanmar) took a firm stand that China should take part in the conference. At the conference, Nehru made a number of efforts to support Zhou Enlai, giving a helping hand to New China, which had just ascended the international stage. In sharp contrast to the above period, the deterioration of China-India relations and the confrontation between the two countries from 1959 to 1976 caused enormous losses.

The China-India border conflict in 1962 brought about serious damage to the friendship between the Chinese and Indian peoples and a long-term suspension of friendly exchanges between the two countries. The shadow of this conflict has not fully vanished even today.

The long-term confrontation between the two countries caused great drain on the resources of both countries, negatively affecting peaceful development of both countries.

Along with the deterioration of China-India relations, relations between China and Pakistan rapidly improved and strengthened, with the result that India had to face a two-front unfavorable strategic environment. Due to the continued improvement of relations between India and the Soviet Union and the formation of

an alliance between them, China, whose relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated at that time, also had to face a two-front disadvantageous strategic environment. After the U.S. President Nixon's visit to China in 1972, there emerged in South Asia the confrontation between China, Pakistan and the United States on the one side and India and the Soviet Union on the other side, giving rise to a serious threat to peace in Asia and the world.

Since 1976, China-India relations gradually improved and witnessed greater development in this new century, producing a very encouraging 'bonus'.

Both China and India are two neighboring countries on a fast rise among newly emerging countries. The friendly cooperation between the two countries would offer an indispensable and important guarantee to their peaceful rise.

With the swift development of trade and economic relations between China and India, China has become one of India's biggest trade partners. Since both China and India have quite similar national conditions, they could learn from each other's strong points to offset their own weaknesses in the fields of economic and social development. It is well known that China's hardware and India's software are complementary.

China has developed friendly relations with both India and Pakistan in a separate way, while trilateral relations between China, India and the United States have maintained a general balance. These are conducive to stability in South Asia.

Both China and India have common stands

on a number of major international questions. With both countries taking part in more and more regional and international regimes, they support each other on many important questions such as climate change.

It can be seen from the above comparison that it is not empty talk that China India friendly relations are in conformity with the fundamental interests of the two peoples. That harmony is important, has more and more become a common understanding of both the governments and the peoples.

### **III CORRECTLY HANDLING DIFFERENCES**

It can be seen from the history of international relations that it is somewhat of a rule that differences of one kind or another would emerge between countries especially between major powers. In order to safeguard relations between the two sides, it would be of the utmost importance to handle these differences in a correct way. Since the differences between China and India have been related to questions such as Tibet and China-India boundary, which involve sovereignty and territorial integrity, the above point has become even more conspicuous.

While facing differences, it is necessary, first of all, for both sides to deal with the relationship between the partial interest and the overall interest very carefully.

Reviewing the developments since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India, one can see that relations were quite smooth when both sides could handle their differences calmly, attaching importance to the overall

interest. For instance, both sides dealt with the Tibet question quite well in the initial period after the establishment of diplomatic relations between them, with the result that this question did not affect the development of their friendly relations in the 1950s.

However, after the Tibet rebellion in 1959, both sides over-estimated the seriousness of their differences on the Tibet question and later on the China-India boundary question and failed to give first priority to the overall interest of safeguarding their friendly relations, leading to the conflict and confrontation between the two sides. Today, when people reexamine China-India relations in that period, it is not difficult for them to see that despite the fact that differences between China and India involved core interest of both sites, they constituted only questions of partial interest after all, while safeguarding China-India friendly relations were related to their fundamental and overall interest on the question whether a peaceful environment could be maintained for both countries. So it is not difficult to differentiate what is primary from what is secondary. Again, the situation from 1988 up to now has indicated that despite the fact that differences between both sides on the China-India boundary question have not been resolved yet, both sides have reached a common understanding that while seeking ways and means to settle the boundary question, both sides should develop relations in other fields and make efforts to create atmosphere and conditions conducive to the final settlement of the boundary question in a fair and reasonable way. Due to this understanding reached by both sides with the overall interest of China-India relations in view,

China-India relations witnessed quite fast development during this period.

Another question related to above is that it is imperative that both sides should avoid making their policy in an emotional way. It could be seen from the situation during the period of confrontation between China and India that emotional approaches appeared on both sides, so that calm and objective judgment on things could not be made and a few wrong decisions were taken with serious consequences. On the contrary, judging from the situation of a short setback of China-India relations in 1998 after India's nuclear tests, both sides tried hard to avoid emotional approaches, so that China-India relations could come out of the low quickly and were restored and developed again.

It is also important that both sides should offer greater guidance and education to the masses of the two countries to prevent feelings of narrow nationalism. Since both the Chinese and Indian people have been oppressed by imperialism and colonialism for a long period of time strong sentiments of nationalism are clearly found among the masses of both countries. This is understandable. However, under these conditions, it is even more necessary for both sides to guard against the sentiments of narrow nationalism and defend the overall interest of maintaining friendly relations between the two countries. Otherwise some very radical remarks and actions might emerge, leading to unwarranted damage to the relations between the two countries. The demarcation between patriotism and narrow nationalism is whether overall interest has been put in the foremost or not. Apart from the two governments, the media

of both countries have also a great responsibility in correctly guiding public opinion.

#### **IV**

#### **POLICY BEING THE KEY FACTOR**

Since its reform and opening to the outside, China has maintained a high speed of development, while India's development has also been quite fast since its economic reform in 1990s. With the continuous strengthening of their comprehensive national strength, one has often heard such arguments from world media about the rivalry that will ensue between China and India as two big powers, leading to sharp competition and conflict between them. Since China's speed of development has been a little higher than that of India for a number of years, this has become one of the grounds for some people in India to propagate the 'China threat' theory.

While reviewing the history of international relations, people can see that though the balance of power in a region forms an important factor affecting relations between different countries, the decisive role is played by the policy of relevant countries.

In Europe, France and Germany were 'arch enemies' in history, with many wars between them. However, since the end of the Second World War, both countries have maintained friendly relations all along, forming the core countries in promoting the integration of Europe. While answering a question raised by the author about the reasons for such change, a French ambassador to China said that the reason was very simple: both France and Germany, summing up historical



experiences, were determined to adopt a policy of mutual friendly cooperation and promotion of the integration of Europe, with the result that relations between the two countries had developed continuously.

Take the relations between the United States and Japan as another example. In the Second World War, they were the major rivals fighting the Pacific War, which ended through the surrender of Japan. However, after the war, due to the rise of the Soviet Union and the triumph of the Chinese revolution, the United States swiftly readjusted its policy towards Japan to prop up Japan and the two countries formed an alliance.

After the founding of New China, both China and the United States were locked in confrontation with each other for a long time, owing to the policy adopted by the United States to contain and encircle China and the policy adopted by China to form an anti-U.S. united front. However, after 1971, along with the change in the international situation, both China and the United States drastically readjusted their policy towards each other, leading to a fast thaw of their relations and the establishment of diplomatic relations between them later.

Analyzing the China-India relations, one can see that from 1959 to 1976, it was mainly due to some major mistakes committed by both sides in their policies that their relations deteriorated and confrontation followed. On the contrary, the situation since 1988 has shown that despite the fact that the comprehensive national strength of both countries has greatly increased than before, their friendly relations have been continuously

developed. The major reason for this is that both countries have adopted a policy of good-neighbourliness and friendship towards each other. History has proved incontrovertibly that policy is the key factor.

The policy of good-neighbourliness and friendship adopted by both China and India towards each other at present has important implications.

Either side while viewing China-India relations as one of the most important bilateral relations of their country, have taken the level of their relationship a step higher. In 2005, both sides agreed to establish a 'China-India Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity' on the basis of the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence'. This should be the fundamental starting point for both sides to deal with various specific questions between the two countries.

Both sides have also reaffirmed in official documents that the common interests of both countries outweigh their differences and that the two countries are not a threat to each other. Both sides decided to settle their differences through peaceful and friendly consultations, without using or threatening to use force against each other. In view of the armed conflict between the two countries in 1962, this policy adopted by both sides has a very high significance.

On the China-India boundary question, both sides have agreed to a political settlement and have come to common consensus that while seeking and developing ways and means to settle the boundary question, both sides would continue to nurture and develop their



relationship actively in other fields. Both sides have also agreed that pending an ultimate settlement of the boundary question, the two sides should strictly respect and observe the Line of actual Control and work together to maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas.

India has readjusted its original stance of recognizing Tibet as an 'autonomous region' of China to the present stance of recognizing that "the Tibet Autonomous Region is part of the territory of the People's Republic of China" and has declared to not allow Tibetans to engage in anti-Chinese political activities in India. On the same note, China has recognized Sikkim to be part of India's territory.

Both sides have adopted a policy of actively promoting friendly exchanges in all fields such as: between the governments, political parties, parliaments, armed forces, industrial and commercial circles, cultural circles, youths and civil organizations of the two countries. Both nations have also attached increased importance to developing their trade and economic cooperation leading to betterment in the economic relations between the two countries.

China has adopted a policy of developing friendly relations with India on the one hand, and with Pakistan and other South Asian countries on the other. It has expressed its desire for South Asian countries to be friendly with each other. China has tried hard to persuade the relevant parties to reconcile when conflicts occur between India and Pakistan or between India and other South Asian countries. This policy of China is conducive to peace and stability in South Asia.

However, there exists a small number of people in India that still consider that it is 'encircling' and 'containing' India; by maintaining more than cordial relationships with Pakistan and other South Asian countries. What is the truth? It has been more than twenty years since China adopted the above policy of maintaining ties with Pakistan and other countries in its close vicinity, however, China-India relations greatly improved in this period. There is further no evidence of any kind of 'encircling' and 'containing' of India by China. Perhaps some friends in India are still worried. Then the best way is to continue their watching on this question.

In recent years, India's diplomatic strategy has shown a certain degree of inclination towards the United States. However, India has still adhered to its policy of friendship with China, with the result that a general balance has been maintained in the trilateral relations between China, India and the United States.

The above are some important aspects of the policy of good neighbourliness and friendship adopted by both China and India towards each other. These are achievements obtained by the two countries through their summing up of both positive and negative experiences in the past and constitute forceful guarantees for the future development of China-India relations. It has not been easy to gain these fruits and they therefore need to be highly cherished by both governments and peoples.

**V**  
**ENERGETICALLY ENHANCING MUTUAL TRUST**

With the common efforts of both sides, the

main trend of China-India relations has been quite good in recent years. However, the inadequacy of mutual trust between the two sides has still been quite an outstanding problem, with certain negative impact on their relations.

The inadequacy of mutual trust between China and India has been mainly revealed through the fact that the "China threat" theory has been on rise once again in India in recent years.

There are a number of factors leading to the inadequacy of mutual trust between China and India. Some are the questions left over from history while some are related to real politics. Thus the situation has been quite complicated.

The first factor is that no major breakthrough has been achieved on the China-India boundary question. Since 2003, a number of rounds of talks have already been held by the Special Representatives of the two governments. During Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to India in April 2005, both governments signed the "Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the China-India Boundary Question," thus laying a good foundation for both sides to realize the final solution of the boundary question. However, owing to the complicated nature of this question, it seems that there is still some difficulty to reach the final settlement. Since the impact of the 1962 border conflict between the two countries has not fully vanished, the Indian side is still considerably apprehensive about China on the boundary question.

The second factor is that the economic gap

between China and India has been widening. In recent years, both China and India have achieved a fairly fast paced economic growth. However China's rate of growth has been higher than India's, with the result that the economic gap between the two countries has been widening. Since India has had all along quite a strong motive of competing with China, it seems that India is worried over the issue of the gap in economic development.

The third factor is the influence of geopolitics. Along with the development of China-India relations, the impact of geopolitical factors on China-India relations has been gradually reduced. However, these factors still play a role to some degree. As stated above, India still has some apprehension on China's relations with India's neighbors, while China has also its concern on India's military and security cooperation with countries like the United States and Japan.

The above factors are interwoven together instead of being isolated from each other, leading to a rather complicated situation that requires considerable difficulty to solve them. Therefore, time and patience are needed and both sides should refrain from getting a wrong conclusion on the overall relations between the two countries. At the same time it is advisable that both sides would attach much importance to this question and make more efforts to enhance their mutual trust in an active way.

In accordance with the situation of China-India relations and with reference to historical experiences of China's relations with some other countries, if both sides could make greater efforts in the following three areas, it would play an important

role in enhancing mutual trust between the two sides.

Judging from the situation in recent years, mutual visits and meetings in third countries between leaders of China and India could play an especially vital role in promoting the mutual trust between the two countries. Leaders at the highest level of both countries have conducted in-depth exchange of views, from a strategic altitude, on ways and means to further develop relations between the two countries, offering some new thoughts and proposals and publishing some very important documents which have much significance in guiding the relations between the two countries. These mutual visits and meetings have also shown outstanding effects in dispelling the dark clouds which might appear sometimes in the sky of China-India friendship and promoting the confidence of both peoples in the future of their friendly relations.

The final settlement of China-India boundary question will be the most important key to greatly enhancing mutual trust between the two countries. Judging from the present situation of China-India relations, it seems conditions are already mature for the final settlement. (a) The over-all relations between China and India have been good with Strategic and Cooperative Partnership already established. This is very conducive to the final settlement. (b) This century will witness the great event of simultaneous rise of both China and India. Both countries need a peaceful environment, which will be in conformity with the national interest of both countries. The final settlement of the boundary question will be a very important factor for this purpose. (c) The Agreement

on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the China-India Boundary Question has laid a good foundation for the final settlement. (d) Since so many rounds of talks have already been held between the Special Representatives of the two governments on the boundary question, both sides are already quite aware of each other's stand on the question. If there is still a gap, it will not work for either side to press for unilateral concession by the other and the only right way is to explore a framework of compromise in the spirit of mutual respect and understanding for one another.

Both sides could also take more active steps to support each other on major questions involving core interests of the other side. This would fully reflect the practical significance of their Strategic and Cooperative Partnership and play an important role in promoting mutual trust.

The situation in recent years has indicated that both sides have taken a number of steps in this respect with favourable consequences. The main steps taken by the Indian side in support of China are: recognizing Tibet as part of China's territory; taking resolute measures so that the Olympic torch passed through New Delhi successfully in April 2008. The main steps taken by the Chinese side in support of India are: recognizing Sikkim as part of India's territory; making positive remarks on India's desire to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council; adopting a flexible attitude so that the resolution to lift nuclear embargo against India could be passed by the Nuclear Suppliers Group. On the major question of climate change which involves fundamental national interest of both

nations, China and India have cooperated very closely to make a joint approach, which has won the attention of the international community. Since both China and India are large countries and are very active in the international arena, both sides could find a number of problems on which mutual support is needed in the future. If both sides could give more support to each other, the mutual trust between the two sides would certainly be greatly enhanced.

In general, China-India relations have matured gradually, after passing through a tortuous course in the past sixty years and this is very significant. In the future, with the continuous development of friendly relations between the two countries, it can be expected that those unstable factors in their relations would be further removed so that mutual trust between the two countries would be steadily enhanced. It is believed that people could take quite an optimistic view on the future course of China-India relations.